Bare-chested in the park

Why did our ancestors put on clothes? Probably to keep warm. Why should a woman have to wear a shirt on a hot summer day? Because . . . because . . . because the law says so, that's why.

Ramona Santorelli wants to change that. The state law that tells women to cover their chests in public is discriminatory, she says. To challenge the law, she's scheduled a bare-chested picnic at Cobbs Hill Park today in hopes of getting arrested.

Santorelli's no-nonsense attitude has a certain logic. The only difference between a woman's breasts and a man's breasts, she says, is excess tissue — and sometimes, if the truth be told, the excess is on the chest of the man.

But logic is not law. "The purpose of the law was to prevent sexual provocation," explains District Attorney Howard R. Relin, who's not enthusiastic about prosecuting topless women but says he'll do it. (Maximum penalty: $250 or 15 days in jail.)

Provocation? Fewer rapes likely occur on the nude beaches of Europe than on the fully clothed meadows of Cobbs Hill Park. And why, in all justice, should women's comfort be dictated by men's urges?

But logic and justice are one thing; custom is another, and custom dies hard. Women's rights pioneer Susan B. Anthony, cited by Santorelli as a role model for radicalism, would have been appalled at the thought of showing her ankle in public, let alone taking her shirt off.

Susan B. lived in Rochester for 60 years, and probably went on a picnic or two at Cobbs Hill Park. If she were there today, would she complain that Santorelli's protest is too trivial even for comment? Or would she break into a stony smile and say, right on?

Topless protester says she can make point without arrest

By Robyn Roberts
Democrat and Chronicle

Even if she isn't arrested today for being topless in a public place, Nikki Craft thinks she will have raised people's consciousness to end what she calls gender discrimination.

Craft, of Oshkosh, Wis., has been campaigning for women's rights and against pornography and rape. She plans to join at least four Rochester women today to protest a state law that prohibits women, but not men, from going topless in public.

The group is scheduled to hold a picnic in Cobbs Hill Park, on the corner of Monroe Avenue and Culver Road in Rochester, sometime today.

"I am not an exhibitionist," Craft said. "This is a hard thing for me to do. I will be demonstrating for the right to be nude, not *appear* nude."

Craft, who was braless and wore a T-shirt with the slogan 'Topless Equality', spoke yesterday with the editorial boards of the *Democrat and Chronicle* and *Times Union*.

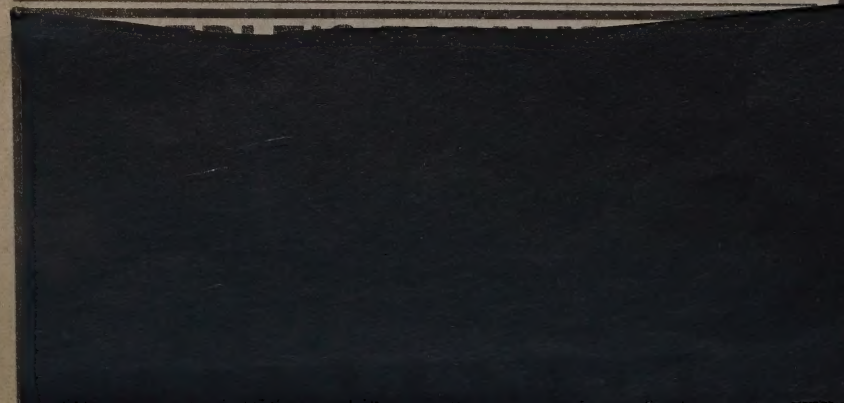
"Keeping a shirt on is a protection of male fantasy so men can undress women when they want to in topless bars and in magazines . . .," Craft said.

Craft, 36, has led protests for female topless freedom in Santa Cruz, Calif., and Cape Cod, Mass., and also was arrested after going into stores and ripping up *Hustler* or *Penthouse* magazines.

Craft said she was raped when she was 15 years old and believes the man who raped her did so because he read pornographic magazines that said women want to be treated that way.

Although she has been arrested 41 times during demonstrations against pornography and for toplessness, Crafts said getting arrested has been "tough" because some people do not take her seriously.

Most of the time she is only given a citation, she said.



Breast-baring women begin court battle

The seven plead innocent to indecent-exposure charge

By John O'Brien
Democrat and Chronicle

Seven women made their first court appearance yesterday in what they expect will be a "wrenching effort" to convince society that women should be able to bare their breasts in public.

But already they've convinced a few people that there's nothing wrong with a topless woman trying to get some sun, the women said yesterday. They were arrested Saturday at Cobbs Hill Park on violations of a state indecent-exposure law prohibiting women from being topless in public.

All pleaded innocent yesterday in City Court.

"The atmosphere at the park was not what we intended — it was very frightening," said Mary Lou Schloss, 38, referring to a group of about 100 people, many of them men, who heckled the protesters.

"But in that group of men, a few of them got some education. After we'd had our shirts off for a few minutes, I heard one man say, 'So what's the big deal?' " said Schloss, of 237 Vassar St. "That's exactly our point.

"Our bodies are normal. There's nothing obscene or sexual about it — unless you're the victim of a pornographic mind."

The women wanted to be arrested to challenge the law in court on the grounds that it discriminates against women because men are allowed to go topless in public.

They are basing their claim on a clause in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which says that laws cannot discriminate between the sexes without good reason.

City Judge Herman J. Walz assigned Assistant Public Defender Lawrence L. Kasperek to represent four of the

Breast-barers plead innocent

FROM PAGE 1B

women at their arraignments yesterday. The three others said they would represent themselves.

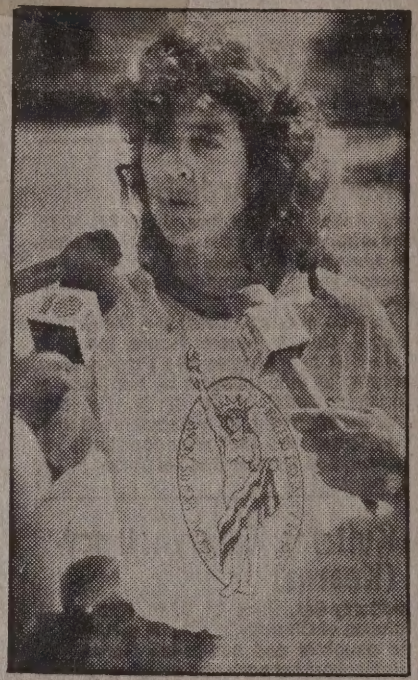
The women, some of whom wore T-shirts with a drawing of a topless Statue of Liberty to their arraignments, are also receiving legal assistance from David Moss, a Rochester lawyer who volunteered his help through the American Civil Liberties Union.

If convicted, they would face possible maximum sentences of 15 days in jail, a $250 fine, or both.

"I understand that these women may attempt to raise some constitutional issues," Walz said in court. "I take this issue very seriously."

One of the women arrested was Nikki Craft, a national feminist protester who has been arrested eight times in California in similar topless protests. She said she is pleased to have Walz hear their case.

"We've got a judge who knows issues of equality," said Craft, 36, of Oshkosh, Wis. "I knew it when he called us women, I knew it from the tone in his voice, and I knew it when he called it an important constitutional challenge."



Burr Lewis Democrat and Chronicle

Defendant Ramona Santorelli, wearing shirt with topless Statue of Liberty, before arraignment.

FRONT PAGE

Sunday Democrat and Chronicle

JUNE 22, 1986 ROCHESTER, N.Y.

Steven Purcell Democrat and Chronicle

Nikki Craft bared her breasts before a crowd at Cobbs Hill Park yesterday to protest a state law banning the action.

'A circus' in the park

Steven Purcell Democrat and Chronicle

Phylis Santorelli, mother of demonstration organizer Ramona Santorelli, watches the crowd gathered to see nine women remove their shirts in protest of a state law. Seven were arrested.

Crowd watches as 7 women arrested after baring their breasts at Cobbs Hill

By Craig Gordon and Robyn Roberts
Democrat and Chronicle

Seven women were arrested in Cobbs Hill Park yesterday for taking off their shirts to protest nudity laws, while a crowd of about 100 supporters and thrill-seekers watched.

The women bared their breasts to protest laws allowing men, but not women, to go topless in public. They plan to use their arrests to change the law.

Nine women formed a circle and took off their shirts about 2:35 p.m. in a grassy area north of the reservoir in the park, bounded by Monroe Avenue, Culver Road, Highland Avenue and Interstate 490.

As the women removed their shirts, many men in the crowd, who were shirtless themselves, began shouting catcalls.

"It was a circus atmosphere," said Nikki Craft, a protest organizer who has led similar demonstrations in other parts of the country.

Police arrested seven women. Two were not arrested because they put their shirts back on when officers asked them to.

Charged with exposure of person, a violation punishable by up to 15 days in jail and a $250 fine, were: Craft, 36, of Oshkosh, Wis.; Ramona Santorelli, 28, 23 Girton Place, Rochester; Lynn Zicari, 24, 305 Cobb Terrace, Brighton; Deborah Ann Seymour, 34, 24 Bateau Terrace, Irondequoit; Kathleen Reilly, 40, 643 Highland Ave., Rochester; Mary Lou Schloss, 38, 237 Vassar St., Rochester; and Elise Jo Tooley, 27, 142 Mount Vernon Ave., Rochester.

The seven women were taken to the Highland Section police office, given tickets ordering them to appear in City Court at 10:30 a.m. Monday, and released.

Their protest drew men and women supporting their cause, but more men said they came to see the women take off their shirts.

"Mainly I came down here because we brought a cooler of beer and there were women exposing themselves," said Michael Bell, 25, of 499 Meigs St.

Craft, a protest organizer, said she considered not taking off her shirt because she was fearful of the crowd. At one point, when Craft asked for supporters to sit down, one man shouted back, "Let your bra support you."

The women tried to explain their beliefs to the crowd but were shouted down.

Craft then took off her shirt to a growing chorus of yells from the men. One-by-one, the eight other women peeled off their shirts.

Rochester police, who left briefly, returned about 10 minutes later, and Capt. Robert Tacito of Highland Section asked the women to put on their shirts.

With the crowd booing, Craft said, "You're watching society change right here." She told Tacito, "I will not put on my shirt. I am committing an act of civil disobedience."

Police led the seven still-shirtless women about 100 feet to police cars, where they put on their shirts before being taken in.

Said Zicari, one of those arrested: "I don't think it will accomplish anything right away. If they can get used to seeing a woman's body, not in the way the perverted magazines show them, it won't be such a big deal."